

Press release

The 11th QueerScope Debut Film Award 2026 goes to the feature film

TRIAL OF HEIN by Kai Stänicke

»Kai's short films have already won over our Hamburg audience. We are now delighted that he is deservedly receiving the QueerScope Award for his feature film debut.«

(Hanne Homrighausen, HIQFF & QueerScope Executive Board)

»Rarely has queer cinema from Germany been so subtle and so multi-layered!«

(Stefan Abrahams, PERLEN - Queer Film Festival in Hannover)



TRIAL OF HEIN (Philip Froissant, Paul Boche), 2026 © Florian Mag

This year, the programme makers behind the QueerScope Festivals decided to honour the historical drama **TRIAL OF HEIN (122 mins, Germany, 2026)**, the debut feature film by director Kai Stänicke. The prize is awarded with a monetary prize of 5,000 euros.

Since 2016, QueerScope has presented an annual debut film award for the best feature-length debut on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex, asexual and other queer themes. QueerScope e.V. is the umbrella organisation for independent queer film festivals in German-speaking countries. Twenty-seven queer film festivals are currently represented by QueerScope; together, they attract around 40,000 visitors annually.

AWARDS CEREMONY

The 11th QueerScope Debut Film Award will be presented this year on **25 October** as part of the **30th PERLEN Queer Film Festival in Hanover**; a discussion with the director, Kai Stänicke, is planned following the screening. The director is expected to attend further QueerScope festivals, where he will be available for audience discussions and press interviews.

ABOUT THE FILM

TRIAL OF HEIN premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival in February 2026 and is due to be released in German cinemas on 27 August 2026. Paul Boche, Philip Froissant, Emilia Schüle, Stephanie Amarell and Julika Jenkins feature as part of a large ensemble cast in Stänicke's feature film debut. On 20 February 2026, TRIAL OF HEIN received the Berlinale Teddy Jury Award.

PLOT

In his feature film debut, Kai Stänicke uses sparse, evocative imagery to tell the story of a young man wrapped in mystery who returns to the island of his childhood. The village

community is torn between rejection, curiosity and doubts as to whether the newcomer really is who he claims to be. Gradually, a multifaceted story unfolds about feeling like a stranger in familiar surroundings, and about the power and unreliability of memory.

PRESS REVIEWS

TRIAL OF HEIN is a thrilling, slow-paced and discreetly narrated film by the German director Kai Stänicke. And given the stylistic consistency that characterises every one of the film's 123 minutes, it is hard to believe that this is a debut feature.

(from „Heimatfilme auf der Berlinale“ in DIE ZEIT by Peter Kümmel, 15 February 2026)

With TRIAL OF HEIN, Kai Stänicke has successfully created a film that captivates from the very first moment, establishes a unique and deliberately mysterious atmosphere, and, above all, achieves what even films by far more experienced filmmakers often fail to do: bring its story to a powerful, convincing conclusion..

(from „Mit wenig Mitteln viel erreichen“ in taz by Michael Meyns, 13 February 2026)

Part of the film's pleasure is in discovering why Friedemann behaves this way, through childhood flashbacks that Hein visualizes in the spaces around them — though it wouldn't be a major spoiler to call “Trial of Hein” a film of closeted youth.

This central theme is drawn from Stänicke's own experiences as a queer filmmaker, but dramatized through a tale of interrogation. Though captured with a handheld wandering camera, each frame is composed with immense formal control.

(from ‘Trial of Hein’ Review: An Intriguing Brechtian Period Drama Puts Memory on Trial, in [variety.com](#)
by Siddhant Adlakha, 12 April 2026)

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR

»‘Trial of Hein’ is an intimate exploration of identity and belonging. Who hasn’t looked back at an earlier version of themselves and been surprised by how much has changed? Going back home forces us to confront the person we used to be. At its core, the film captures that fragile moment when you stop pretending to be who you once were, even if doing so turns you into a stranger to those who thought they knew you.«

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF THE DIRECTOR

After studying film and completing an internship at X Filme Creative Pool, Kai Stänicke initially worked as an assistant director before realising his own projects. His short films have won awards from, amongst others, Saatchi & Saatchi, Berlinale Talents and Nespresso Talents. His feature film debut, TRIAL OF HEIN, received funding from the Berlinale’s Script Station and the Wolfgang Kohlhaase Scholarship.

SCREENING DATES with film discussion

25.10.2026 PERLEN – Queer Film Festival Hannover (Awards ceremony)

Further dates for queer film festivals, which Kai Stänicke may attend, will be announced shortly.

Official film information (DCM Distribution)

QueerScope e.V. is funded by



Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
für Kultur und Medien